

View from the chair

A shake-up in the corridors of power at Westminster will impact on those making decisions about the future of policing



Paul McKeever, chairman of the Police Federation

They say a week in politics is a long time. With four Home Secretary's in the last three years and three police ministers in the last twelve months you'd be hard pushed to refute the fast pace of political life. What you might be left thinking however is that continuity is hardly the government's strongest suit, certainly on policing matters.

There are likely to be few police officers around the country who will mourn the loss of Jacqui Smith, now synonymous with the scandalous and ill-advised pay debacle which led to a Police Federation campaign and 25,000 off-duty police officers descending on London to march, lobby and rally on the decision not to backdate police officer pay. Arguably, in recent months the only thing that devalued quicker than the pound was Ms Smith's political currency but it would be churlish not to recognise her achievements in a couple of areas where measures introduced will be of benefit to all police officers, and for which we are grateful. Firstly, on listening to our call to extend the roll out of Taser to all forces and secondly her provision of £2.5m for police treatment centres; both vital for the welfare and support of our officers on and off duty.

We are sad to see the departure of police minister, Vernon Coaker with whom we had good relations. Perhaps what I perceived to be an empathy with policing was borne out of his father being a police officer and so his knowledge and understanding were already grounded.

Keen not to let the dust settle under our feet, we have been quick to make introductions with the new police leaders.

A week after the cabinet reshuffle was complete, Ian Rennie, general secretary of the Federation, and I both met with the new ministerial team; Alan Johnson the new Home Secretary and David Hanson the new police minister. We welcome them both to their new posts and trust they will listen to the views of the frontline.

Our concern is that with so much on the police reform agenda, and so much facing us as a service we need strong, decisive leaders. This debate on policing must not be in isolation but within a holistic review of the whole criminal justice system. Only then will the system truly work as the public rightly wants and expects.

We also have concerns about how this new team will realistically be able to deliver any meaningful developments in such a finite time. They come to post in the pre-election grave yard shift where their time will likely be spent electioneering, standing arm in arm with police officers and cuddling babies. What none of us needs is to be sold another package of promises that causes more work and is scrapped as soon as a new administration comes in.

Our hope is that at the very least the new team deliver our three pronged wish list; to respect our three-year pay deal, to maintain warranted police officer numbers and to mend the disjointed criminal justice system.

Police officers will be pleased to hear that we have had firm reassurance from Mr Johnson that he is committed to the three-year pay agreed by his predecessor.

More surprising, given previous indications, was the u-turn by the Conservative party who loosely talked of reviewing all public sector pay deals. Whilst they were swift to backtrack, it gave an alarming insight into the possible future plans of a party currently in the shadows that at present does not have to commit.

With more change on the horizon and future budget cuts in policing we are definitely facing uncertain times and what is needed is certainty from our police and political leaders. What we don't need is the wall of silence recently displayed when times got hard and the police were being chastised by the media or, even worse, those who are quick to criticise without bothering to ask questions and understand the real pressures of policing the frontline.